



**Using Outcome Tracking to Plan Our E-Journal Future (Poster Presentation)
By Barbara P. Silcox**

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Abstract

This session will address how the NIST Research Library uses customer data to make collection development decisions. The presentation will briefly describe the survey instruments used and techniques employed to obtain input from NIST researchers on the library's journal collection. The session will also cover how the library develops and maintains relationships with customers and stakeholders to get feedback and guidance on collection development issues on an ongoing basis.

Background

The NIST Research Library's primary customers are the researchers in the NIST laboratory programs at the Gaithersburg location. The laboratories conduct research in a variety of physical and engineering sciences, including biotechnology, building and fire research, chemistry, electronics, information technology, manufacturing, materials science, mathematics, metrology, and physics.

The library is one of three work units within the Information Services Division (ISD). It has a staff of 17 and maintains a collection of about 300,000 volumes and 1,150 journal subscriptions. Over most of the past five years, the collections budget has remained static. As a result, the Research Library cut its journal subscriptions by 31 percent in 1999 to stay within its budget. An additional 13 percent in cuts in journal subscriptions were made in 2000.

Beginning in fall 2001, the NIST Research Library undertook two fairly extensive assessment activities – a customer satisfaction survey and a benchmark study. Through these assessment activities the library gathered valuable data that were used for guiding strategic planning efforts and for making operational improvements. The results of the customer survey and benchmark study revealed unmet needs, service and communication issues, and organizational strengths. They also provided a tremendous growth experience for the staff and had an impact on library customer and stakeholder perceptions regarding library operations and the professional capabilities of the library staff.

The gathering and analyzing of customer data have become an integral part of the library's operations. The library uses a variety of mechanisms for listening to and learning from its customers and stakeholders. Furthermore, customer data collection and analysis are part of all library staff annual performance plans.

Listening to and learning from our customers

2001 Customer Survey

The survey was administered over a two-week period in October 2001. To increase the likelihood of participation, the library staff selected those NIST divisions known to be the library's primary customers. An e-mail inviting NIST researchers to participate in the survey was sent to 55 of the 80 NIST divisions. With 528 respondents from 48 divisions, the survey results represent the perspectives of a wide variety of NIST researchers. Approximately 20 percent of the target audience responded to the survey. There were 584 comments submitted by 254 respondents on the open-ended questions. The high response rate and large number of comments clearly indicate a high level of interest in the NIST Research Library.

Survey responses indicated that electronic and print journals, technical books, textbooks, and conference proceedings were all highly used items. This was particularly useful information, because the library had been shifting its limited resources away from technical books and textbooks to continue its support of the journal collection. Respondents' satisfaction was compared with their use of the library's information resources. This analysis revealed that among the very high use resources there were moderate to higher levels of satisfaction with electronic and print journals and lower levels of satisfaction with technical books, textbooks, and conference proceedings.

Important themes that emerged from the survey results included the following:

- A need for more electronic journals and a preference for electronic resources over print;
- Subject areas in need of improvement to support new and ongoing areas of NIST research;
- Low levels of satisfaction with certain types of information resources (technical books, textbooks, and conference proceedings);
- Lack of awareness of many of the library's information resources, particularly databases, specific journal titles, older journals, and materials in the NIST Archives collection;
- Misperceptions about how the library selects information resources for the collections and how past journal cancellations had been handled.

2003 ScienceDirect All-electronic Survey

In the summer 2003, the Research Library was informed of numerous pricing options and cost increases to its subscriptions for Elsevier/ScienceDirect journals. One of the options was dropping the print format and switching to electronic-only format. In keeping with the library's philosophy of seeking customer input prior to making major collection-related decisions, a short survey consisting of six questions was disseminated to select groups of NIST researchers. The survey was available in a web-format on the NIST Virtual Library (NVL) and also disseminated as a Word document in an e-mail attachment. In addition, paper copies were available on the library's bulletin board in the hallway outside the library. We leveraged the selected groups of NIST researchers with whom we have established relationships to reach a larger audience in the quickest and most efficient way.

The response rate was impressive. Within the first few hours of distributing the survey, more than 70 people responded. In all, the library received 223 completed surveys. Sixty-two percent of the respondents indicated a preference to access journal articles in an electronic format, four percent indicated a preference for print, 23 percent indicated a preference for both print and electronic, and 11 percent told us that their preference depends upon the journal being read.

When researchers were asked about which format (print or electronic) they would choose if they could only have journals in one format, 91 percent opted for electronic. However, most respondents who preferred electronic-only, also wanted assurance that the library would always have access to these titles no matter what happened to the library's future subscriptions. NIST researchers seemed to be well aware of the issues surrounding perpetual rights for electronic formats.

Based on what we heard from our customers, the library is planning on dropping the print versions of its Elsevier/ScienceDirect titles in January 2004. The money saved is being applied to the purchase of additional titles.

Keeping Customers Informed

The Research Library uses a variety of methods for communicating with its customers and stakeholders. The primary vehicles for informing library customers about services and products as well as how their input is incorporated into library collection development decisions are the homepage of the NIST Virtual Library (NVL) and the division's monthly newsletter, *ISDirections*.

The Research Library Advisory Board (RLAB), established in fall 2002, enhances two-way communication between the library and NIST researchers. RLAB members are expected to recommend directions for the library's collections and services consistent with current and future trends in NIST research. The RLAB serves as a means for the library to keep the NIST community informed about ISD products and services. The RLAB was instrumental in obtaining input from the NIST community regarding the library's subscriptions to Elsevier/ScienceDirect journals.

Actions Taken

Throughout fiscal years 2002 and 2003, collection development activities focused on enhancing critical areas of the collection. The library undertook a core journal project and put new life into its book selection activities. Through consortial arrangements the library has purchased access to electronic backfiles and archives in key disciplines.

Mechanisms were put into place to facilitate the tracking and analysis of collection development activities. Because we seek demographic data each time a survey is conducted we know customer preferences at the division and operating unit (OU) level. The data can be compared with circulation, acquisitions, and interlibrary loan/document delivery data, which are also tracked at the division and OU level. This enables us to target services better.

Next Steps

To meet the expressed needs of NIST researchers for more electronic journals and to find ways to incur savings to cover the continual increasing costs of information resources, the library is considering additional e-only subscriptions. NIST researchers will be consulted along the way.

We will also monitor e-journal usage closely to make sure that actual use aligns well with expressed need.

Additional Information

Deutsch, Paula and Barbara P. Silcox. 2003. "Learning from Other Libraries: Benchmarking to Assess Library Performance." *Information Outlook*. 7(7):18-25.

Silcox, Barbara P. and Paula Deutsch. 2003. "The Customer Speaks: Assessing the User's View." *Information Outlook*. 7(5):36-41.

Silcox, Barbara P. and Paula Deutsch. 2003. "From Data to Outcomes: Assessment Activities at the NIST Research Library." *Information Outlook*. 7(10):25-31.

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